

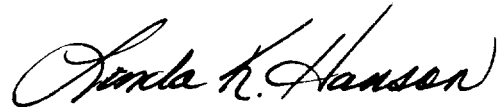
Advancing Advanced Composition
A Guided Tour through an Ideal English Communications Course

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Linda K. Hanson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "L" and "H".

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Purpose of Thesis

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The following text is a tour through an advanced composition course. Points of interest include a philosophical background of communication and composition instruction, suggestions for implementing changes in course objectives, and a portrait of an ideal writing classroom. The author uses a fitness perspective to describe a suggested teaching approach and uses a “workout” model to describe the objectives of a writer-improvement plan. The ultimate goal of the tour is to propose changes in current advanced composition courses that will help novice writers become more effective communicators.

“We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of all our exploring
will be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time”

--T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

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Preface: The Mission

"Space...the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise.
Its continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds,
to seek out new life and new civilizations,
to boldly go where no one has gone before!"

—Gene Roddenberry, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

I propose a course of exploration, an attempt to go beyond the boundaries that have become familiar ground. I propose an advanced composition course that urges its adventurers--the pupils and the instructor--to expand their horizons, add to their knowledge, and discover new levels of accomplishment. The advanced course is intended to be an extended study of written communication and should entail higher expectations than found in first year writing classes. In the process of advancing students' relationship with language use, the course should also involve "creative writing," an expressive exploration of form and content in a not-necessarily-practical form. All writing, "creative" and practical, is communication through visual symbols, and it should be the goal of every writer to effectively use the symbols to transmit his or her message. Ultimately, the goal of any advanced composition course is to help the writer become a better communicator.

How does one help another become a better communicator? I will take you on a journey through my assumptions, perspectives and suggestions in an attempt to describe an ideal course that would effectively encourage improvement and creativity in writers. In the end, I hope to be convincing enough that perhaps my dream may live in the light of the coming day.

The Reader's Guide: Notes from the Author

"“Whatever you're playing around with...you have to bank on the chance that someone will understand you. Someone will be able to hear what's really happening.”

--Vernon Reid, musician

Before we begin, please be aware that my approach to the topic of course reform is intentional. At times I will address you, the reader, directly as I am doing now and I will also speak with a less academic tongue on occasion. Both techniques are employed in the spirit of a guided tour through my ideal advanced composition course.

Also, the concepts developed between these covers were created particularly with Ball State University's English program in mind. My vision is influenced by my experiences at Ball State, so some assumptions and criticisms may be, unintentionally, more case-specific than others. In general, the concepts I am about to explain should be applicable to any school, any where.

Finally, I do not claim to be a good writer. Perhaps this spark has already crossed your synapses, and if not, I admit it freely anyway. My authority to discuss advanced composition stems not from my expertise and skill as a communicator, but from my study and thought on the matter. I have made a considerable effort to prepare a text that conveys my message and have done so to the best of my current ability. If you do not approve of how well this work is written, please support the revision or development of a course that will help others do better.

With that said, you should be ready to embark on the journey through my world of advanced composition. When you are set to begin, I will meet you on the next page.

The Assumptions

"Silly rabbit, Trix are for kids!"

--television commercial

Approaching the advanced composition course, we first pass through the outer atmosphere which contains the assumptions of my proposal. I wish I could claim that everything I have typed, which you now hold in your hands, was entirely my idea. Alas, to prepare for this journey, I consumed a sizable amount of material. Many of my assumptions arise from direct experience and observation as a student. As of this writing, I have spent over four years at a university: one year as a student of design in the college of architecture and planning, and three and half years as a student of English education. I also have extensive contact with many students of various backgrounds, which provides me with a deep pool of information to draw from. Beyond the information gathered through observation, I have substantiated my claims with support found in the research of composition, computers in English studies, and creativity. A tremendous amount of material has been written about writing, some of which I have sampled and previously documented in an annotated bibliography. Insight gained from investigating these resources and others has resulted in a sphere of knowledge (which we will begin to examine in the next paragraph!) that consists of research as well as experience.

One of the outermost layers of my assumptions is my perception of the field of English studies. To begin with the obvious, English is a language. A language is used for communication and is involved with the creation of knowledge. It then stands to reason that the field of English is a study of the language, its oral and written communication, and its role in creation of knowledge, particularly in texts

that speak to us through time. My instructional objectives are not derived from a focus on separate disciplines (reading/literature, writing, speech, listening, and linguistics), but from a belief that all the disciplines are interconnected and based in the development and/or discovery of meaning (Mohr 2). If communication is the reason English, or any language, exists, then English studies should exist to increase our knowledge through our human ability to communicate.

What, asks the skeptic in the back, do you mean by “communication?” Communication occurs when an idea is conceived, represented, received, and (re)constructed (Smith, *Reading* 185). Effective communication has occurred when the concept sent, approximated in some form of language, is understood—that is, it resembles the intended concept of the sender. For example, I feel a particular sensation and represent this feeling by saying “I’m thirsty,” and if you respond by handing me a glass of water, then communication has occurred. If, with the same sensation, I say “I’m thirsty,” and you respond by offering me a fistful of flour, then communication has not taken place. Comprene?

Ah, says the skeptic, but does the message received have to be a reproduction of the sender’s thought? Good question. I acknowledge that which is understood will always differ somewhat from what was conceived by the sender. The difference occurs because the schema, which influences the reconstruction of any message received, during reconstruction will be different from the schema during production (Smith, *Reading* 21). The differences, however, can enhance education by creating constructive dissonance. Debate and discussion require differing opinions and views, the result of different schema. Since culture affects schema, students of different backgrounds will bring varying perspectives, enriching the study of things that are communicated (Graff 49).

What type of things can be communicated? What is the meant by “the

message” that is being sent? The message need not be a discreet piece of information; it is whatever the communicator is trying to say. This could be an object, an action, an emotion, a tone, a question, etc. The message is the idea which is embodied in a series of interpretable symbols, called a “text.” It takes the participation of a receiver to complete the transaction of communication (Rosenblatt 11-12). The receiver may consist of the self or of others, and the communicator’s consideration of her audience may be viewed as a continuum. At one end, there is reflection, where the primary receiver is the self and a second party receiver is of little concern to the sender. Persuasion is on the other end of the spectrum, where an outside party is generally the primary receiver and therefore given a large amount of concern. Regardless of who receives the message, if someone receives it—even if the someone is the sender himself—then communication has occurred.

Now that I have emphasized communication in English studies, it is time to move on to the specific realm of composition. Writing instruction has generally tried to develop communicators at beginning and advanced levels. Working within this established framework, it should be the duty of beginning composition courses to prepare students to use the conventions of our language to transmit to readers (Kirby 155). Conventions (a nicer term for what are often regarded as “rules”) exist to increase the likelihood of communication (Smith, *Writing* 59). As novice writers, they should understand spelling and grammar practices, know about paragraph construction, and be able to write a coherent essay. In advanced composition, the goal is to—pardon the statement of the obvious—advance the composers; help beginning writers become better communicators. Improvement comes from additional knowledge and practice (Smith, *Reading* 199). Additional knowledge offers more tools and choices to the writer and practice gives him a

chance to apply them. Through additional knowledge and practice, any writer can advance her composing abilities.

One aspect of advancement should be creativity. Creative responses generally surpass the entry level of mediocre because creativity tends to describe the ability to generate new perspectives, uses, or solutions (Weisberg 4). Innovations depend on divergence from norms, and since each person is an individual--unidentical to any norm--everyone has the potential to be creative by exploiting her uniqueness. Variety can be a result of opportunities to safely explore personal differences and to put the differences to use. If repetition is the death of art, then variety is a sign of its life. Art tends to be elevated to a level above utility, and if we desire writers who are advanced, we must help them reach up, through their innate creativity, and touch the artistic plane.

The flight to improvement will not be without turbulence. Some of the resistance will come from within the students themselves and needs to be overcome if progress is to occur. One thing to be aware of is that students, in general but not in their entirety, are resistant to change. Humans can be suspicious of unfamiliar territory, and students are indeed human (Myers 286). Furthermore, proactive interference adds resistance to change (205). In college writing instruction, many students feel they already know how to write and are not receptive to new or additional instruction. This becomes a problem when students have developed writing habits that are not necessarily effective or efficient. Instruction must counter student resistance to change if progress is to be made.

Another force limiting advancement is student resistance to being challenged. The feeling of immanent failure can trigger psychological defense mechanisms that result in escape, avoidance, or aggressive behaviors (Glover 283). To push through this barrier, think of challenge as an acquired taste: it develops

from successfully trying a small bite and discovering that it's not so bad. Students need to be encouraged to take chances and discover success as a result of their risk-taking (Macrorie 144). Follow me on this run: Positive reinforcement will result in more exploration (Glover 280); exploration opens up the potential for further discovery; discovery is a key to learning (Smith, *Reading* 200); and learning is the key to improvement!

A third point concerning student behavior and classroom instruction: expectations influence results. Students respond to the expectations that are placed on them (Arends 100). Let me say from observation and experience, many students are not handing in the quality of work they are capable of, partly because they know that minimal-effort work is accepted by those who are grading. That is a serious charge, I know, but it seems to be true. I acknowledge that there are many factors influencing evaluation practices, but I feel expectations should be higher than they currently seem to be. The result would be a lot of irritated students, but those who rise to the challenge and seek instruction rather than a pat on the head will benefit. Challenges should be demanding, not impossible. Failure should be temporary, a set back until hard work results in achievement (Roberts 89). If we raise our expectations within reason, I think students will respond with better efforts and better works. They may resist challenges at first--and may object until the moon sheds a tear--but students can accomplish a lot if the challenge is structured to stretch their abilities, build their strengths, and provide opportunities for success (Arends 110). My proposal will address these qualities in detail a few pages from now, but until then, keep in mind the need to have high expectations about the efforts of your students.

Finally, an assortment of resources are available to help students improve their abilities to communicate. A pool of resources is in the field of English itself.

Every discipline is concerned, in one way or another, with forms of communication. Literature, composition, speech, and linguistics have overlapping objectives and information. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of the whole, an instructor strengthens the student's understanding of the parts (Moffett 45). For example, literature should be taught alongside composition, because literature, in its basest form, is someone else's composition. Literature provides models of communication while inviting responses and, possibly, providing inspiration (Graves 67-70). The disciplines of English should serve as resources for each other in a collaborative attempt to improve communication of students. Next, the communication field stretches beyond the realm of English studies and we should know our neighbors. It is too easy to continue mending fences while persons in journalism, advertising, marketing, psychology, and other fields have made discoveries and developments in communication. We need to keep abreast of new developments, wherever they appear (Roberts 92-94). Finally, technology should be integrated into the English classroom. Computers, in particular, can be used by communicators in a vast variety of ways to communicate more easily and more effectively (Gerrard 24-25). Audio and video equipment can be manipulated to help students "realize" written works as well as to study communication methods in other media (Moffett 43). Tools that encourage and enhance the student's quest to learn should be used. Thus, using whatever resources are available, instructors can help their students become better communicators.

You have now met some of the assumptions I made in creating the concept I am about to unfold for you. My world of advanced composition awaits, described from a perspective that I will explain in the next section. There are more assumptions scattered throughout the next segment and the rest of the text, but the words above should help you get your bearings before we continue our trek.

The Course of Action: The Perspective

"The vehicle is just a means, an enabler, an extension of your idea. And that's the joy of it--the journey."
--Chris Stevens, *Northern Exposure*

As we move closer to the ground level of the advanced composition course, I want to put the proposed world into perspective. I am using the concept of "perspective" as a vehicle of explanation, allowing me to illustrate my concerns through an analogy. Based on the perspective, I have developed a model which can be viewed from the points of discussion and instructional practice. It should remain clear, however, that my concerns are embedded within my solutions, and these concerns should be met by any attempt to help writers write better.

The challenge in advanced composition is improvement. If one were an athlete or, at least, fitness minded, one would utilize a workout program to strengthen one's attributes and increase one's performance capacity. Likewise, I believe an advanced composition course could be discussed with "communication fitness" in mind. (please note: this perspective should not, however, be confused with the theory of "mind as muscle." I am using the concept of fitness to aid discussion, not to describe the mental processes that occur when learning.) A workout model of writer improvement would provide a theoretical guide for writing instruction, modifying the terms and concepts of the fitness field to fit the characteristics of communication. Thus, a writing program could consist of the basic components of a workout: initial stretching, warming up, conditioning, strengthening, cooling down, and final stretching. By increasing expressive flexibility, strengthening articulation, and practicing proper technique one can become a healthy communicator.

One advantage of the fitness perspective is that the view will be new to pupils, precipitating learning by exploding preconceived notions that limit success. Students bring prior knowledge and expectations of writing courses and their writing abilities to class, and these notions can interfere with their learning (Romano 9). Given an unconventional schooling environment--a nurturing classroom [which we will visit later in the tour] and an innovative approach to instruction--students must develop behaviors adapted to the new circumstances (Graves 34-35). Therefore, good learning systems smother complacency by preventing students from relying on previous habits.

An instructional analogy is also beneficial because new information is connected and reinforced by old information. The need for improvement and the means to do so may not be clearly understood by novice writers (40). By utilizing the high public awareness of physical wellness, people--particularly college students (who have had physical education in secondary school and, often, at the university)--can relate physical self improvement via a workout regimen to communication self improvement via a writing program. True, an analogy works only as long as it refers to a common pool of knowledge and accurately reflects the subject being discussed. If there is reason to believe, as is the case for traditional college students at a school with a wellness course requirement, that most of the writers share a body of general knowledge, then an analogy such as the fitness perspective and the workout model will add to the meaning of communication instruction.

The fitness perspective and workout model can tap students' knowledge of wellbeing. Using a workout model for discussing and implementing instruction, I am suggesting that communication is necessary for good health. I am suggesting one must work to get results. I am suggesting it will not necessarily be easy to improve, but that everyone can be more fit. I am suggesting that it is the student's

responsibility to make the improvement. I am attempting to inform the student that he or she has the power to become stronger, more efficient, more flexible as a communicator. With the mind-frame of improvement established, students should be more likely to accept instruction and should actively seek ways to become better communicators.

Having stressed improvement and established a tone that calls for hard work, I believe I hear a question about motivation. Usefulness is a powerful motivator, and to create communicators who communicate well outside of the academic realm, one should use a perspective that connects the classroom and Real World (Beane 9). By emphasizing communication, an instructor can help students see that a course in writing (or reading/literature, or speech, or listening, or linguistics) is part of a system of interaction that reaches beyond collegiate boundaries. Communication is part of human life, not an artificial experiment to be graded and forgotten. A fitness perspective alludes to the necessity of communication in a context larger than school. After all, communication is the successful interaction between two parties, and creative interaction is necessary for good health (Kollen 19). On a more practical level, good writing (and the general ability to communicate effectively) is required in many occupations. In an advanced class, beginning writers have the opportunity to develop and refine skills that will make them more desirable to future employers, and, therefore, more likely to be hired. I have not even mentioned the way that advanced communication abilities can help a student write better in her other courses! Therefore, motivation to excel can be found all around if communication studies are tied into life concerns (Beane 9).

At this point, we are not far from viewing the proposed advanced composition course itself. In the next section, I will use the fitness perspective and the workout model to make suggestions concerning ways of improving instruction.

Course of Action: The Implementation

"Of course, he who has put forth his total strength in fit actions has the richest return of wisdom."
-- Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The American Scholar*

To address the challenge of the advanced composition course, I'll begin by suggesting that writing involves decision making, and a good text is the result of good decisions. If a writer is aware of available writing options and the pros and cons of the options, then he can choose the most effective means to send his message. Ultimately, I am suggesting an approach that encourages writers to tap the subconscious, spill it on the page, examine the mess, and attempt to detect patterns. Once a writer begins to identify some patterns, she can use these regularities as tools for communication. Thus, consciousness can lead to better decisions and better decisions can lead to more effective communication.

Classroom roles are affected by an emphasis on conscious decision making. The student's responsibility is to make decisions and accept the consequences--good or bad. The teacher's responsibility is for providing 1) information for enhancing decisions and 2) a healthy environment where decision making can be practiced and improved. Both parties must do their part if success is to be achieved.

Success has occurred when students become better writers. Enter the workout model. The workout model provides terms and concepts that illustrate the objectives and characteristics of an effective advanced composition program. Stronger, more effective, and more efficient writing practices can be developed by following a writing program that includes stretching, warming up, conditioning and strengthening, cooling down, and some sort of exhibition.

Now, welcome to the course...

Initial Stretching

Prior to a physical workout, stretching is important because it improves flexibility and reduces the risk of damage during the stress of the exercise. The initial phase of a composition course should encourage communication flexibility by stressing creativity and prewriting/composing behaviors. The objective of the stretching phase is to help writers expand their range of writing experience while establishing procedures and mind-frames for further study.

Flexibility in composition means being able to creatively solve communication problems. Problems may arise while conceiving a subject or topic, expressing a concept, improving a draft, and interpreting a text. To improve a student's ability to meet the challenges of writing, tasks should be assigned that expand her experience (Romano 20). Reading is one way to increase student experience that allows a composition course to take advantage of literary resources (Graves 68). Instructors should strive to assign challenges that encourage writers to explore different modes of writing, different view points, different styles (stream of consciousness, journalistic, flowery, allegorical, etc.) and different topics. Teachers should challenge students to shatter ineffective habits (such as an over-reliance on the five paragraph essay as a mode of expression) and develop a larger repertoire of writing behaviors. Students may cling to types of writing that feel most comfortable, but if we encourage them to stretch their experiences, they would increase their comfort zone. Divergent thinking activities, such as problem solving games that reward unique solutions, encourage efforts to use language in innovative ways (Romano 32). Sculpting, painting, drawing, and other artistic media could be useful to introduce communication concepts without the interference of preconceived thoughts that often surround writing activities. Using nonconventional approaches might make students more vulnerable to learning than traditional paths that are

already worn. Writing activities could include creating lies about things they have done, role-playing an interview, or sharing a harmless secret with classmates (Kirby 30-31). Through exploration and discovery, a writer stretches his range of composition possibilities.

While stretching students' experiences, the initial phase should also introduce the procedures and expectations of the course. Classroom rules and expectations should be made explicit and agreed upon by the students (Atwell 83-84). As part of the exploration process, classroom resources should be introduced and the students should have the opportunity to become acquainted with the available equipment and materials. Students should develop a sense of responsibility for what occurs in the classroom and this responsibility will help them feel empowered to take charge of their own expressions (Graves 38-39). Discussion procedures also need to be taught--initiated, moderated, and practiced--if discussions are to be effective (Arends 359). Prior to successful discussions, however, the instructor must create an atmosphere of trust and security in the class community. Instructors can accomplish this by offering plenty of support to the students, asking questions to show that you are concerned with what they have to say, and sharing your own attempts to achieve as a writer (Kirby 25). These preparatory measures should be taken so that the writers can benefit from the workout ahead.

The stretching phase should emphasize decision making in respect to the initial stages of writing. A final draft is of little concern at the point of invention because concentrating on details may inhibit creation (Atwell 69). To emphasize exploration, numerous short, in-class activities that address a variety of forms and aspects of written communication would be appropriate. Reader response journal writing could be employed at this stage to encourage interaction with reading and to familiarize students with free writing (Bodmer 2). Since a final product is not the

focus of the first phase, evaluation should reflect process over product at this point in the course. Credit could be given for participation in the variety of activities and for experimenting with multiple means of expression (for example, a student who responds to every challenge with a poem or an essay is not expanding his range of experience and, therefore, not meeting the goals of this phase). The initial segment of a writing course, a time of exploration and discovery, should help students acclimate to the course while stretching their range of communication experience.

Warmup-

When the students have stretched, it is time to get the blood pumping. In a physical workout, this is essential because the blood surges from the heart, is oxygenated in the lungs, and then feeds the areas that are performing the work. Without a good blood supply, the muscles become starved for nutrients and cannot function properly. Steady, aerobic activity prepares the body to face challenges by conditioning the support systems.

The second phase of advanced composition should be a warmup period that helps students “get in shape” by encouraging efficient and productive work practices. Since writing practices vary from person to person, efficiency and productivity will depend on the behavior of each individual. However, it should seem obvious that all writers can benefit from revision, which takes time to do. Therefore, the second phase prepares writers for larger challenges by encouraging productive revision and the efficient use of time.

Revision is essential because each draft should contain changes that improve the effectiveness of a text. My observation is that many beginning writers settle for only a few changes (if any) before submitting a copy for evaluation. The second phase of the course should help establish the practice of drafting and revision by

emphasizing repeated improvements of a work. Assignments can still be short but with the expectation that there will be more than one version of each work submitted for evaluation. Evaluation, since process is still the focus, should credit multiple drafts that demonstrate efforts to improve a text. For any given assignment, the instructor can set goals (such as grouping like concepts together, establishing a logical order, prioritizing points of discussion, etc.) that help a writer develop a strong text and evaluate a work's progression to see if these goals were met through successive drafts. The objective is to develop revision behaviors in beginning writers that will help them compose more effectively in the future.

The other objective of the warmup phase is creating writers that write more efficiently. Again, every writer has a different method, so there are no broad answers that will suit everyone's needs. However, it is common, particularly among college writers, to use time inefficiently when composing a text, and addressing this problem will help many. Often, the text a teacher receives is a text that was thrown together at the last minute. Requiring multiple drafts that demonstrate progress will begin to condition writers to a steady work pace. Strict deadlines may seem rather juvenile, but if improvement is to occur, revision must be a part of it. Revision requires that time be spent preparing a draft, reviewing it, and making adjustments that increase the likelihood of it being understood. A last minute draft does not leave enough time for review and revision, and therefore a text, no matter how good it may seem to be, is not as good as it could have been had it had further development. To encourage students to develop their works, phase two should demand that every writer arrive at each class further ahead than he was the previous meeting. Specific criteria should be established to guide text improvement (Example: You are to have a draft that organizes your concepts into related groups and written in complete sentences by Wednesday). A strenuous pace

will condition the writers for the hard work that will be necessary whenever they must write a text on demand, such as for the classroom or the work world.

Emphasizing multiple drafts and requiring that there be evidence of steady effort should help establish good writing habits and warm them up for the challenges in the next phase of the course.

Strengthening and Conditioning--

After warming up, a person begins the demanding segment of the workout: strengthening and conditioning. It is during this period that the muscles are challenged and a large amount of energy is expended. Exercises are performed that are intended to develop and tone the person's body and enable him or her to improve performance. In writing, strengthening and conditioning pertain to the development of powerful texts.

The strong writer controls the challenge of expression through decision making. An advanced composition course should provide novice writers with opportunities to exercise their decision making skills while producing texts. Using the flexibility developed in the initial phase and the conditioning that was achieved in the drafting phase, writers should begin producing complete texts in the third stage of the course.

Physical strength is developed by repeatedly overcoming opposing forces. Writing strength is developed by repeatedly overcoming communication challenges. The challenge of completing the writing process and producing a final text will provide the writer with a wide range of problems that must be solved if communication is to occur. Decision making skills will be exercised as a writer selects her topic, attempts to express her concepts, reviews and revises her text, and refines the work into a finished product. An instructor can lead discussions, using

literary or other examples, about what makes a strong text and a powerful writer. Different views of “good literature” can be examined to illustrate different views on the subject as each student develops his own measure of quality. After establishing a sense of quality, evaluative measures can be developed to gauge student works as they reach completion.

Assignments in the strengthening phase should be the most traditional of any given during the course. Literature can be studied in depth using writing as the vehicle of exploration (Moffet and Wagner 183). Conventional research papers, literary critiques essays, and position papers are examples of assignments that reflect tasks that writers will be asked to master in settings other than the writing classroom. The restrictions will increase the difficulty of accomplishing the task and thus increase the need for writing strength to rise to the challenge. Furthermore, longer periods of time will be needed (though progress should continue to be steady from class meeting to class meeting) to finish a work. Graded evaluation should focus on the product produced: is it an effective piece of communication that meets the requirements established by the assignment? Writers who develop their skills under these conditions should be able to perform excellently in other circumstances.

Exhibition--

Exhibition is not necessarily a component of a workout, but it can be involved in the general picture of fitness. Someone who works hard at improving his physical condition would be encouraged by observing results of his efforts. Reinforcement is necessary to maintain a behavior (Glover 275). Likewise, if a writer has toned her writing into a powerful text, it is rewarding to make the work available for others to interact with. To raise the level of interest and motivation, an audience beyond the classroom is effective (Kirby 163).

Composition courses should provide outlets for students to share their writing with others outside of the class (Clark 159). Contest, conference, and scholarship information should be available to every English department and can easily be passed on to students. It would be simple to require that each student select at least one work to refine and submit for publication or presentation at a student research conference. Winners will bring encouragement to the students and prestige to the program.

Composition courses should also provide information about the publishing process. It is probably safe to assume that most college students do not know how to get a text published. Why not empower your writers to be heard abroad by helping them learn the publishing process? Especially for students who desire to pursue careers in higher education, publication information would be a valuable addition to their undergraduate experience.

A composition course could also publish its own journal that contains works of its students. Each year or each semester, the students could be required to select a text to submit to a class publication. Each student would receive the compilation of his peer's works and would have a tangible product from the course experience. Computers also provide the possibility of electronic publishing, which is one more way of creating accessibility to a writer's text. A direct audience such as this would ensure that every student would experience being published.

Final Stretching--

The final phase is a cool-down stretching period. This is important when finishing a physical workout because it helps to maintain flexibility and eases the body out of the stressful activity. Likewise, the course should provide a time at the end for students to once again revel in experimentation and stretch their writing

abilities. This is a time to exercise one's creativity--a chance to play with the language and toy with its elasticity--while incorporating things discovered during the course. Students should review their prior work and build on their successes and mend their shortcomings, but should not lose sight of trying new things (Murray 14). This should be an enjoyable time for teacher and student because of the freedom involved. Writing tasks could include writing short stories, poetry, descriptions of unusual objects; playing any of the challenging word games that are available in toy departments; generating a class-wide story with each student contributing a character; etc. After meeting the demands of previous projects, this should seem less stressful. Therefore, the instructor's objectives should be based on expanding creative abilities and encouraging exploration.

Courses should challenge and nurture students and teachers alike, and advanced composition should not be an exception. Regardless of how an instructor structures instruction, hard work and good, old-fashioned fun should be the central ingredients of any writing course that hopes to develop effective communicators.

The Environment

“Form ever follow function”

—Louis Henri Sullivan

Welcome to the classroom. Come in and have a seat. So far, the scenery looks quite ordinary: strange-colored walls, chalkboards, fluorescent lights, and 30 little desks all in neat rows. Such facilities should seem familiar, since you are now in the traditional classroom. The traditional classroom was designed with the idea that information was to be passed down from the Educated to the Educatees. When information is to be passed down, this arrangement is still useful, because it limits distractions and increases the focus of attention (Arends 80). Class-wide discussions, lectures, testing situations, and class-wide directioning can be nicely accommodated by the traditional classroom.

However, the topic of my discussion has been a course that involves action: the creation and development of texts. Please take a moment, and imagine the place where you like to write or would feel the most comfortable expressing yourself in writing. What is the place like?

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Does your place consist of five or six rows of desks with molded plastic backs and a wire rack underneath? Does your writing surface amount to a small slab of solid material, the width of a text book and the length of two legal pads, that usually discriminates against those who are more articulate with their left hand? Does your place put you knee to back, elbow to elbow, with the persons around you?

Somehow, I doubt there were too many yeses in response to these questions. The traditional classroom has its benefits, but it does not encourage writing.

Every writer needs a place where she can go and write. To develop better writers, composition courses should treat students as writers and provide a work place that encourages writing (Atwell 54). For some, the place would be a homey den or studio where the writer can surround himself with things that inspire and comfort him. For others, the place may be a highly structured setting where the writer feels driven to work without distraction, surrounded by resources that encourage her productivity. Whatever the situation, an environment should encourage student writers to experiment, discover, develop, and apply the knowledge they gain during their education.

At this point, I would like to introduce the writing studio. The studio is intended to provide a place where students can go and practice communicating. Materials and equipment are provided to aid the writing process, while instruction is available during class hours to add guidance to the resources available to the developing writers. Enrolled students will be spending a lot of time in the studio in an effort to meet the demands of the advanced composition course and, hopefully, they will want to use the space to develop their own, non-scholastic works and interact with their classmates. This space is to the writer what a chemistry lab is to a chemist and a design studio is to an artist.

You'll notice as we enter the room that the door is locked. It is unfortunate that such security precautions need to be implemented but such is modern life. Since the studio is accessible around the clock and the persons and equipment inside are too valuable to risk damage or loss, students are issued a key while they are enrolled in the course. Maslow would insist that safety is a basic human need that must be met if a writer is to work towards advancement (46).

Yes, I mentioned that the studio is open 24 hours. Writers do not necessarily keep banker's hours. Many people feel they do their best writing at night, and others prefer the morning. Inspiration can occur at any time--which should not come as a surprise to anybody. Therefore, students who are making a concentrated attempt to improve their writing should not be limited by class time or computer lab hours. For the simple reason that people are different, developing individual writers requires accommodating different behavior schedules.

As you enter the studio, whatever time of the day or night it may be, you will notice that the room contains 15-20 workstations; one for each student. Class size will need to be limited [ah...remember, this is an idealized portrait!] so that the instructional techniques and equipment I am proposing can be implemented effectively. Also, because of accessibility, only one class is assigned to a studio per semester or quarter. Each student has her own space--a workstation that is hers until the end of the course. Students should feel like they own a piece of a larger classroom community, and this sense of home will increase their level of comfort and thus their level of production (Atwell 64).

Each workstation is outfitted similarly. Each desk is three feet by five feet with a drawer and a storage box. The desktop is large so a writer can spread out her materials if she so desires and still have room to write. The storage compartments can be secured if the student provides his own lock. This allows him to keep writing supplies and support materials handy without having to haul them back and forth to class all the time. Each station has an adjustable office-type chair, which encourages a student to feel comfortable and, thus, spend more time working. Another feature of each workspace is the instrument that awaits each writer: a computer terminal. Additional furnishings, decorations, and equipment (within reason) may be added by the student as needed or desired, but every beginning

writer is given the initial materials described above to use throughout the course.

One of the classroom resources available to every writer in my proposed composition course is the writing computer system. A computer can be a communicator's servant and can be seen, in its most basic sense, as a fancy typewriter. The strength of a computer is its ability to store and retrieve information. Communicators can take advantage of the computer's strength by storing their thoughts and ideas in a medium that can be easily retrieved, altered and rerecorded. Computers can add to the ease and success of the writing process when used effectively (Hepler 54).

Each individual computer should have access to programs that will be useful to the writer as she develops a text. The most essential program needed is a word processor. Word processors allow writers to type a text, store it, manipulate and edit it. They were designed specifically to make writing easier. Desktop publishing programs were designed to make texts look better. They can be complicated to operate because they have such powerful features, but allow a writer to manipulate his text in a wide variety of ways. Usually desktop publishing packages permit graphics to be integrated from a drawing program or a prepackaged art cache. Graphics are another way of communicating and enhancing a writer's message. Each writer's computer should have these three types of programs available so that the student can make use of them as needed.

The computer can also be used as means of communication beyond text development. Conferencing is one method of helping writers critique and help each other improve their texts. Discussion has long been a recognized source of education. Computers can be used to connect students and encourage them to conference and discuss subjects. Discourse between people can be conducted using computers as a visual telephone. Instead of hearing the words over a line, a student

can see them on the screen. This capacity allows classroom discussion to take on a breadth that is virtually impossible in traditional modes. Using computers, everyone CAN talk at once and still be heard! Students who do not feel comfortable as the focus of attention do not have to face the scrutiny of peer's eyes as when they speak up, for everyone's focus is on the screen in front of them. Electronic conferencing records itself and students and the instructor can go back and review what was said, word-for-word. Furthermore, discussion is not limited to the class, because electronic discourse can be global. Imagine discussing the effect of Milton's prose with a scholar in Madrid. This is possible through the technology available. Electronic mail and bulletin board systems can connect students and instructors from all across the globe. Technology has been generated to open up tremendous possibilities in communication.

Moving the attention from high-tech to low-tech communication, you will notice that several bulletin boards are mounted on the walls. The bulletin boards are meant to be used as a vehicle for communication. The computer system contains a classroom electronic bulletin board to reduce the clutter of those mounted on the walls, but some items are better suited for tangible postings. One board is reserved for the instructor's use for such things as posting assignments, writing contest information, publishing opportunities, conference information, group meeting notices, relevant articles from professional journals, suggestions, advice, etc. The other boards are for student use. One board is used as a writer's exchange. Students have the opportunity to hang works (assigned or personal) on the board so that others may read and respond to them. The other bulletin boards give the writers the ability to somewhat shape their environment. The students should set guidelines at the beginning of the year regulating the use and appropriateness of materials to be displayed (what is acceptable and what is not).

Materials that could be seen on these boards include notices about activities that would be of interest to the peer group, posters, inspirational sayings, poems, quotes, interesting articles, notes of concern about the classroom community, student produced texts and artwork, etc. This helps the writers to feel “at home,” and gives them a vivid world to work in. A lot of energy will be spent on expressing themselves, and a cunning instructor will make use of this effort by drawing conclusions about communication. Essentially, the bulletin boards are meant to be a communication device for the classroom community.

There are several other features of the studio room. For instance, the white surface of a dry-erase board replaces both the chalkboard (chalk dust is bad for computers) and projection screens (for use with transparencies, films or opaque projectors). On a bookshelf at one side of the room is a variety of reference materials. Resources include but, of course, are not limited to a couple of good dictionaries, a thesaurus, a couple MLA handbooks, a *Holman and Harmon Guide to Literary Terms*, a good book of quotations, copies of student publications (student magazines, poetry contest anthologies, etc.), copies of professional journals, and style books from other professions such as journalism, science, etc. A television and VCR are available for instruction and presentations, but are not normally kept in the classroom. The idea behind the equipment and materials is to provide the instructor with many tools to help educate novice writers.

Epilogue: The Challenge

" Well--when I write my book, and tell the tale
Of my adventures--all these little stars
That shake out of my cloak--I must save those
To use for asterisks!"

-- Cyrano de Bergerac

Thus, the tour is complete. Beginning in the philosophical stratosphere of writing instruction, I encircled my proposal with the idea that English is the study of communication, with the goal of creating better communicators. I introduced a fitness perspective to help clarify my suggestions and a workout model to describe the climate of the course. As we moved closer to the ground level of instruction itself, I suggested issues that advanced composition instruction should address if it is to produce strong writers. Finally, I described the topography of the classrooms as it would appear if the course existed as I imagine it. This leaves the journey ready to move to the next step: beyond the page. You have seen a student's idea of what advanced composition could be. What shall be done with the vision? Hopefully, those who can make a difference will rededicate themselves to helping students become better writers and invest the desire, courage, and necessary resources to lead students to success as communicators.

Appendix A: Sample Creative Responses to Assignments

"Improvise! Rhapsodize! Be eloquent!"

—Roxane, *Cyrano de Bergerac*

The following exhibits are examples of possible written responses to classroom assignments. They are on display here to give you a hint of what students can produce if given the opportunity and security to be expressive. The examples are taken from actual classroom assignments that contained no requirements concerning creativity or inventiveness. Browse through these exhibits and imagine the potential that awaits in student writers...

Exhibit A-- Using Alternative Delivery Styles

The first example is an excerpt from a response to an assignment to write an essay that analyzes a theme from a Western humanities course. The author used an unsolicited narrative format, rather than the standard five paragraph essay, to give shape to the discussion of fate versus free-will. The writer identified a conflict and established multiple viewpoints with corresponding support, while enlivening the discussion with the context of a story.

The Destination

Three men were traveling down a road. Like many similar occasions, these men found themselves sharing a conversation. After a time, one of them inquired: Is one free to decide one's destiny? As often the case is, his two fellow travelers offered different views. One insisted that man was bound by an unavoidable fate, and the other argued that he was only subject to his own decisions...

...The third man listened to all of this and proposed his view. One does not have to be wrong, for another to be right-- he began. Perhaps there is a middleground that accounts for the difference in opinion. One says that fate is the predetermined outcome of a situation. Another says the outcome depends on the previous occurrences. The difference is in focus. One says the answer comes first and the other says the problem is primary. What if both occur simultaneously? This is not impossible. For example, a problem in mathematics asks if there are two objects and one adds two more objects, then how many are there? The answer exists before it is calculated, but is not known until the method of derivation is chosen. One chooses the path to the solution, which has been waiting for him. The same is true with destiny...

Appendix A: Exhibit B-- Form Supporting Content

The next example is an excerpt from a research project in an American literature course. The assignment was to research an author, a work, or a type of literature and to write a paper based on the student's findings. The following piece is as the title tells, about blues, and as a result, the author chose to structure the writing style after patterns found in blues songs. In paragraph two, there are three lines with repeated phrases followed by a concluding line, and in paragraph three, four parallel lines are bound together, mirroring two common lyric structures in the genre that is being discussed. Furthermore, note the word play (also a common feature of blues lyrics) in the second paragraph: Footnote and lips, morsel and feast, downplay Shakespeare. Thus, the composition reflects the content and demonstrates an understanding and application of the subject matter.

Before You Accuse Me: Blues as Literature

Before we read, we learn to listen. Before we write, we learn to speak. Likewise, an oral tradition began long before written tradition. Yet, in this day and age, we often overlook the importance of oral communication and the true value of our oral heritage.

In this day and age, we tend to depend on a footnote to remind us that Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were tales enjoyed from the lips of storytellers. In this day and age, we tend to forget that *Beowulf* is a morsel from an age when the *scop* was a highlight of a good feast. In this day and age, we tend to downplay the fact that Shakespeare wrote scripts to be performed rather than read. These works are cornerstones of what we call Western Literature, and each was originally intended as an oral work.

Oral works are alive. Oral works are alive and breathing. Oral works are breathing and changing with every heartbeat of those who relate them. Oral works are living literature...

Appendix A: Exhibit C-- Innovations Within Format Restrictions

The next example is a response to an assignment that challenged the students to write a "letter poem." The format of this type of poetry was being taught, so the author, unable to tinker with form, expressed creativity in the content of the text. The poem is about itself, which was unique when compared to other responses in the class. Poetic quality can be debated, but the qualifications of the assignment (try to write a poem that is a letter to someone) were fulfilled and expectations of content were exceeded.

Dear Me,

*It seems like there was something
something I needed to do.
Do I remember what it was?
Was it something important? Something silly or what have you?*

*-- You would've thought I would've wrote myself a brief note
noting what it was I was to keep in my mind --
My mind, such a mess, so much stuff stored away
A way..?*

*Way in the back of my cluttery brain, seems to me
Me thinks I recall what it is and it was and at last got it right:
"Write a poem for my class." I have to do that yet!
Yet, I best leave a reminder before I forget.*

Appendix A: Exhibit D-- Setting the Tone with Appearances

The assignment was to write an essay comparing and contrasting a literary work and its film adaptation. The author took a risk and stretched the essay an extra step and made the text *look* like a newspaper film review. The nature of the work is immediately recognized and the reader is prepared for the upcoming analysis. All the vital requirements of the assignment were satisfied, while the delivery power of the piece was enhanced by the arrangement of the text on the page.

MOVIE REVIEW

Roxanne

☆☆☆ 1/2

By Craig Martinus
English 300

Roxanne gives Edmond Rostand's classic drama, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a fresh modern twist. The round-about love story of Cyrano, Roxane, and Christian comes alive with laughter thanks especially to the talents of Steve Martin, the writer, executive producer, and star.

Martin plays C.D. Bales, the long-nosed fire chief "Cyrano" to Daryl Hannah's Roxanne and Rick Rossovich's Chris. The movie revolves around the romancing of Roxanne. The handsome young fireman, Chris, pursues the romantic star-gazer, but has trouble communicating with intelligent women and enlists the help of C.D. However, C.D. is love

showman attitude help us to willingly suspend disbelief. The personality created is so engaging that rather than write him off, we wish we could think of such clever things as he does.

The comedy tickles us with laughter through physical and verbal humor, and is a reason why the movie is so appealing.

Physical comedy is aplenty in the film. As the show opens, C.D. engages in a farcical "battle" with two fellows, dueling with tennis rackets and ski poles. The fire chief's fight is only a sample of the ridiculousness of the part-time fire department, which is very adept at bungling anything that has bungling potential. They serve as a definite counterpoint to their swift captain, C.D. They are a jolly band who have trouble with their gear, spray each other hopelessly with water, and need reminding to take the truck when rushing off to a fire. The acting provides laughs via a healthy serving of

has arrived at a script with clever dialogue that twists phrases and plays upon sarcasm and exaggeration. The writing is accompanied by delightful acting which brings the script to bloom.

Roxanne is, after all, a love story. Given as such, one must be willing to accept the romantic comedy on its own terms. Just as *Cyrano de Bergerac* was a departure from realistic drama, *Roxanne* also steps away from the rigid world of reality, with touches of cartoon-like fantasy that contribute to the humor and fantasy of the movie itself. The movie is not faithful to the plot of the play, but succeeds in capturing the delightful romance and humor, and the engaging character of the beloved hero Cyrano.

Appendix B: The Journey (How this Project Came to Be)

"Just wait, Gretel, until the moon rises, and then we shall see the crumbs of bread which I have strewn about, they will show us our way home again."

—Hansel, Grimm's Fairy Tales

How did I get here and where did I come from? These are profound questions that reappear over and over again in the field of English. Rather than discuss creational evolution and my own flavor of existentialism, I will try to simply sketch the development of this project.

The idea came from a reflective journal entry in my advanced composition course, sophomore year, in which I expressed some disappointment with the course and hinted at some ways the course could be changed. My instructor suggested further research and volunteered to help me complete the project. The project became my honors thesis.

In the fall of 1992, recognizing that the project was larger than a one semester task, I began compiling research sources pertaining to the subject. I composed an annotated bibliography--for one credit hour of independent study in research-- of materials that could help me write this text.

During the summer of 1993, I began verbalizing my ideas on paper. I wrote down anything that came to mind about the project. Using these notes, I identified the components of my project and detected what areas I needed to research.

Armed with a notebook of scribblings, I returned in the fall to consult and work with my advisor. I began with an outline of what I had discovered over the summer and then proceeded to create a rough rough draft. After an exhaustive series of revised drafts, I developed what has become the product you hold in your hands.

My advice to future adventurers: Set out soon and do not tarry along the way. The clock continues even if you do not, and it is possible that you'll underestimate the distance or depth to be traveled. I speak of that which I know. Work hard and stay organized, narrow your topic and save procrastination for tomorrow. My project was trying at times but the experience has been very rewarding.

Appendix C: References

"If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost, that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them."

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Note: Many works, including many not cited in this text, were consulted during the development of this project and each has helped, to some degree, to shape the text you now hold. A few of the sources appear here without being cited in the body of the text because they had a significant, if not specific, impact on the ideas presented. Other sources were also consulted.

Appendix D: The Thank Tank

"A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver."
— Proverbs 25:11

This project was completed with the support of many individuals. Certainly there were more influences and sources of encouragement and strength than I could ever enumerate. To everyone, I express my gratitude.

This accomplishment was possible because of the opportunities and abilities provided by the Divine Creator.

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I thank my family who supported my decision to leave architecture and become an English teacher and who have offered encouragement from Day One.

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I am grateful to be in a part of the world where ideas can be expressed and valued, where change is possible, and where people still have some hope.

Finally, I thank those who read the words on these pages and make an effort to receive my transmission. I thank all those who give these concerns some thought and consider my suggestions and act in a manner that benefits the students.